



JUSTICE STUDENT CONFERENCE 2020

A conference for students, trainee solicitors and pupil barristers

International Dispute Resolution Centre
Saturday 7 March 2020

JUSTICE is an all-party law reform and human rights organisation working to strengthen the justice system in the United Kingdom. We are a membership organisation, primarily of the legal profession, comprising barristers, solicitors, legal executives, academic lawyers, law students and interested non-lawyers. We work on an all-party basis, seeking to inform debate, frame issues and influence decision-makers from across the political spectrum. Our vision is of fair, accessible and efficient legal processes, in which the individual's rights are protected, and which reflect the country's international reputation for upholding and promoting the rule of law.

This conference will give you the opportunity to meet the JUSTICE team and some experts in this field, as well as new practitioners. We will be running exciting and thought provoking workshops on our new projects looking at the benefits system, the family justice system, and the Magistrates' Court.

You will also have the opportunity to hear about the experiences of our panel of junior lawyers and receive invaluable advice about the journey into legal practice, and you will be able to attend a clinical session to discuss ideas for dissertation topics.

As a delegate, you will:

- Discuss topical, cutting edge justice issues with leading practitioners.
- Gain a unique insight into the workings of one of the country's leading law reform and human rights organisations.
- Network with other students interested in careers in public interest law.
- Meet the JUSTICE team and explore crucial justice system debates.



JUSTICE Student Conference Saturday 7 March 2020

PROGRAMME

9.30 *Registration*

9.50 *Welcome*

Andrea Coomber, Director, JUSTICE

10.00 **Keynote address by Tessa Khan**

Tessa Khan is an international human rights and climate change lawyer and Co-Director of the Climate Litigation Network (CLN), a project of the Urgenda Foundation. In 2015, Urgenda won a groundbreaking lawsuit against the Dutch government requiring the government to significantly reduce the Netherlands' greenhouse gas emissions. Tessa has spent the past decade supporting grassroots, regional and international human rights movements, advising governments on their human rights obligations and supporting litigation in regional and national fora.

Questions & Answers

11.00 *Coffee break*

11.15 **Morning Breakout Sessions**

(Choose one of the following three sessions)

1. Reforming Benefits Decision Making

Alex Walters, Lawyer, JUSTICE

The benefits system captures some of the most vulnerable people in society. However, there are significant problems around first-instance decision-making and the appeals system. For example, in excess of 1 million Personal Independent Payment (PIP) claims are rejected by the DWP in any given year, but 63% of the 170,000 PIP appeals that are adjudicated on are successful. Moreover, HMCTS has been piloting an online decision-making process for certain benefits appeals. However, many people who access the benefits system are digitally excluded.

Join us to discuss how to promote greater accuracy and accessibility in the benefits decision-making system.

2. Magistrates' Courts and Liberty

Tariq Desai, Lawyer, JUSTICE

In England & Wales, magistrates' courts deal with 90% of criminal cases. However, magistrates are unpaid volunteers with no legal training. Because of this, they do not deal with serious crimes and have reduced powers compared with senior judges.

However, they still have the power to deprive people of their liberty, either by remand ahead of trial or on conviction. This session will look at how the liberty of defendants in magistrates courts is decided and at what safeguards are used to ensure proper decision-making. Ultimately, it will ask whether it is still appropriate that lay people make such significant decisions.

3. Reviewing Family Justice

Ellen Lefley, Lawyer, JUSTICE

Everyday family judges are asked to decide how children should be brought up. This can mean deciding who the child should live with, have contact with, or indeed whether they should remain part of their birth family at all. These cases are unique within the justice system: they require analysis not only of what has happened in the past but also of what will be best far into the future, all in relation to a person who is almost never in the room – the child themselves.

We ask whether the current process in this unique and emotive area is compassionate, effective and fair. Considering the current attempts to increase non-court dispute resolution, join us to discuss the role of the family court and whether we can reduce adversarialism whilst preserving access to justice.

12.30 *Lunch*

Option to attend a clinical session to discuss law reform ideas for dissertation topics

13.30 **Afternoon Breakout Sessions**

(Repeat of morning breakouts)

14.45 *Tea/Coffee*

15.00 **Careers panel of new practitioners**

Zoë Chapman, Barrister at Red Lion Chambers
Ollie Persey, Barrister at the Public Law Project
Shameem Ahmad, Associate at Herbert Smith Freehills LLP

Allan Hennessy, Pupil Barrister at Brick Court Chambers

Clara Sibanda, Pupil Barrister at the CPS

This session will give delegates the chance to quiz a panel of lawyers early in practice about building a career in the law. Our panel is drawn from a range of backgrounds and areas of practice and will give delegates hands on, practical advice on the various routes they may wish to consider in the legal sector.

16.00 *Networking and drinks reception*